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DIARY  
OF  
A NEW CHUM

BY  
PAUL WARREGO  
(AUTHOR OF "L'AUTRE BOUT DU MONDE;").



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## DIARY OF A NEW CHUM.

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**I** WAS asked to a fancy dress ball at the Perkins', and for some unaccountable reason I accepted. As a rule this sort of distraction does not appeal to me. I do not understand the craving that makes people pretend they are Romeo, Lady Teazle, a clown, or a French cook for a few hours every winter.

I found myself the only Mexican in the motley crowd, and was soon introduced to a French peasant, who had taken the opportunity of displaying pretty arms and very shapely legs. She was dancing beautifully, and proved a pleasant partner. After several waltzes, I was allowed to take her to supper.

We had some champagne; not much, but it went to my head, and I felt suddenly hopelessly in love with the French peasant.

I am not what is termed a drinker, though I have a glass of wine or whisky when I feel so

## DIARY OF A NEW CHUM.

inclined ; but never before did champagne make such an idiot of me. My partner looked certainly fetching, while sipping the last drop out of her glass. But why, between two bites into a *paté de foie gras* sandwich, I should have proposed to her is more than I ever will understand.

She took the thing very coolly, and without any of the "too sudden" look about her. She simply asked if I really meant it. I said, "Yes," and was accepted.

While walking home in the cold, crisp air of that early morning, I did not realise that something had happened.

When the bright sunshine woke me I felt as must feel the man who has just spent his first night in gaol, and the terrible reality dawned upon me with mighty force.

Here I was, barely twenty-two, engaged to Miss Mary Smith, an acquaintance of four hours.

Joe came into my room. He had tried to speak to me at the ball last night, but I was too much enraptured with my French peasant. The girl, said my friend, was a dangerous creature. She had had a fellow up for breach of promise some six months ago, and had extracted £800 out of the faithless one. I learned a lot more about my . . . fiancée—

a lot I would have liked to have known yesterday.

Joe showed me plainly what a fool I was, and what a narrow escape I had the chance to have.

My mind was made up. I took my passage for Australia. I wrote her a note, telling her that I had suddenly to go on a long trip, and mentioned Australia.

My packing was done in record time, and when that same night the boat left the wharf a German band played "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

I threw them half-a-crown.

\* \* \*

Most people seem to guess I am a new arrival. They call me a New Chum. I asked them how they could tell. One said by my gloves and stick, another by my clothes and my face, another by my English; for, it appears, I have a London "accent." These Australians were kind, and showed me round Sydney. There is a touch of protection in their kindness, but their welcome and hospitality are pleasing to a stranger. There is no great formality out here, and as soon as a man has caught your name, he offers you a drink.

Sydney harbour? Yes, I have seen it. I

have admired it, but gasworks, advertisements, and rows of hideous houses are spoiling parts of it.

Girls? Yes, they are pretty, have small feet and big eyes—hard-working eyes I should call them. My first impression is that Australian women are far above the men in point of looks and intellect. I believe I am right, for some women have indorsed my opinion. And they ought to know.

\* \* \*

When I left Sydney by train last night it was too dark to see the country. After a broken sleep I woke up early this morning, impatient to have a glimpse of the Australian bush. I saw plains dotted with trees and at times looking like a big park. Sheep, cattle, and horses were grazing along the line. Some of them ran away for a hundred yards; others scarcely took any notice of us, but went on grazing. The landscape is strange to me, and unlike anything I have seen.

The colouring is all subdued; the green of the eucalyptus is nearly grey; the sky is of a very pale blue; the grass is dead yellow. The clumps of dark green pines and the reddish soil are the only notes to relieve this neutrality. Dry creeks and gullies, rivers with more sand than water, are passed now and then.



The horse tied up under the hot sun, the man who constantly keeps the flies moving round his face, remind one that summer is approaching. The trees resemble each other, the houses we pass are all of the same pattern, and miles of posts complete the monotony. The dead trees standing with their contorted bare limbs add a note of sadness. The amount of wire they use in this country is incredible, the waste of firewood lying about is enormous.

\* \* \*

The owner of the station read my letter of introduction, and straight away offered me ten shillings a week. I never expected any wages at first, and told Mr. Telford that my knowledge of woolly and hairy quadrupeds was rather scant. I could tell a sheep when I saw one amongst a lot of goats, but that was all. The owner insisted on my accepting the ten shillings, so that he could swear at me without scruple when my work should require any sort of encouragement. I like his way of dealing.

\* \* \*

Could I ride? Well, I had been on a horse or two at home, but from what I hear, my education will have to start afresh up here.

It has started, this very morning.

They brought into the yard a horse, saddled

and bridled. The animal looked somewhat expectant, so did half-a-dozen men perched on the top rails.

The brute would not stand quiet while I was trying to get into the saddle. It took me over five minutes to put my foot in the stirrup. Then it was time wasted, as the horse flung me some distance as soon as I raised myself from the ground. Result: a sprained shoulder.

\* \* \*

Australians are fond of practical jokes. This was a sample of them yesterday. I now learn that the horse they gave me to try had not been ridden for six months. Neither the boss, nor his brother, would have ridden him for something. The boss was sorry to have allowed the joke. The men came to my help when they saw me stretched in the yard, but they had a good laugh first. One day or another the horse joke will hit them hard when they have to bury a New Chum who could not ride.

\* \* \*

I had to own I could not crack a stockwhip. This seems to be a terrible gap in a man's education out here, so I decided to learn. Bill, the stockman, offered to teach me. He said it was very easy, and started to show me. For half

a minute the long lash hissed angrily and exploded in the air. It certainly looked easy—at a distance. Flushed with pride, and with a twinkle in his eye, Bill handed me the weapon.

I knew it was loaded, but made up my mind to show a bold face and have a try. I bravely took the whip and split the atmosphere without much result except that I nearly cut myself in halves. Bill was certainly inclined to indulgence, and, always smiling, told me to persevere. I had another try; this time I got on better. My teacher was growing excited, and was coming closer and closer to prompt me. Suddenly, the whip hit him fair across the face. He at once lost all interest in my education, and went away holding his cheeks.

\* \* \*

Last night I had a stroll, admiring the sky riddled with stars. Passing near the yards, I noticed half-a-dozen calves shut in a pen, looking lonely and disconsolate, while their mothers from outside were answering their plaintive calls. I have always been fond of animals; they have most of them my sympathy. These calves had certainly, so I opened the gate and let them join their mas. The meeting was touching. I went to bed feeling I had done a good deed.

From what I gather this morning, and from

what the cowboy explains in forcible language, it is advisable to master one's feelings at times, and to let the little calves call their mothers till 7.30 in the morning.

\* \* \*

The softness of heart towards animals from which I suffer is evidently misunderstood here, both by man and beast. My horse, I noticed, had a sore eye, which the flies were constantly worrying. When I got to the creek I bathed the eye as well as I could, then managed with some difficulty to bandage it with my wet handkerchief. So far, the steed, which was a quiet one, seemed thankful, and did not object looking like Don Quixote's Rosinante. But when I got into the saddle, the bandage somehow became loose, the horse bolted, and did a quarter of a mile in very quick time. I succeeded in stopping him, and decided not to let my feelings carry me away any more.

\* \* \*

Many and varied are the duties of the New Chum. I have been here only a couple of months, but have learned many things I never dreamed of. Poisoning rabbits with water and arsenic is one of the branches of the profession in which I am getting fairly proficient. In itself the art is easy to get hold of, but it requires nerves—olfactory nerves.

Branding calves is, of course, painful to me, to say nothing of the calves. The peppery dust of the yards, the choked bellowing of the victims, the smell of burning hide, made me nearly faint the first time.

Cutting chaff by hand power I call very monotonous. It takes such a lot of chaff and dust to fill one bag. Digging post-holes does not maintain its novelty very long.

\* \* \*

As for cutting Bathurst burrs, I have been at it a week already. So far, I feel satisfied that the brain of a New Chum can stand a good strain.

Mat and Syd (I don't believe they own any other names) are camping with me on a creek 25 miles from the homestead. Every morning after breakfast we leave the shady timber and ride about in a treeless paddock of about 10,000 acres. We take our lunch and water bags, and go the whole day from one Bathurst burr to another. When they are growing scattered our horses stop on their own accord, and we wield the hoe without dismounting. Often we strike patches of half an acre or more, so we get off and cut burrs for hours.

Yesterday the boss rode out to see how we were getting on. He told us it was 110 deg.

in the shade. I am sure he did not get his information in this paddock.

I find that the less brain a job requires the more one's brain works. This sort of work is purely mechanical; monkeys could be trained to do it. During the long lonely hours memories come back in a stream, some still fresh, some long forgotten, covered with the dust of years, and bearing the scent of dead leaves. Some are sweet and some are bitter. The calmness of everything stirs the imagination, and faces of far-away friends rise from the streaming ground like mirages. The same feeling holds me when I ride for hours along the fences. The step of the horse, the ceaseless creaking of the saddle rock the mind into a half-sleep, accompanied by dreams.

Before sunset we go back to the camp, and while the billy boils and the meat goes through a process resembling cooking, we have a wash in the creek, and soon forget that we are tired. By the time we have finished the meal round the fire the stars are out, and the glorious night is upon us.

\* \* \*

I love these evenings, and fully enjoy the pipe I smoke while watching the fire. Above our heads the big gums blot out the stars with the dark, uncertain form of their foliage, and

while I listen to the frogs in the creek, to the curlew, and to all these strange noises of a strange land, Mat and Syd talk horses.

My two mates are authorities on horses; they know the equine history from the horse of Troy up. The dates of the battle of Hastings, of the discovery of America they have forgotten, or perhaps never knew. The kings they know have quaint names; the victories were mostly won in the months of October and November; the battlefields not far from Melbourne or Sydney. Their memory is simply astonishing. They know a long list of horses' names taken from all the languages of the world.

Not being a racing man, their knowledge is wasted upon me, and my conversation has, I am sure, little attraction for them. They are good fellows, somewhat sorry for me that I was not born in Australia. They are very obliging, and quite willing to forget at times what I am. I should think that theirs is a happy lot, for they live in a perpetual hope of becoming rich men suddenly. Their Providence spells Tattersall, and when their number will come out—well, they will own racehorses!

\* \* \*

My bed is under a big gum tree, from which opossums shake leaves and twigs upon me

while they are playing in the light of the moon. My mattress is made of gum leaves, my pillow of boots and clothes. My alarm clock consists of swarms of flies; it works too early for my taste. The sunrise is no doubt beautiful, but as a rule we are not in a fit frame of mind to admire all its beauty. This is why sunsets are described much oftener and much better than sunrises.

My mates told me there are many snakes about. I ought to have been thankful for the volunteered information, but it spoiled my first nights. The smallest wood-bug crawling amongst the dry grass represented to my searching eyes a tiger snake of tremendous proportions.

Mat and Syd have also described venomous black spiders, with a red dot on their back, which bite you into lunacy inside ten minutes. They mentioned casually bull-dog ants and centipedes big enough to give a New Chum the horrors.

Syd owns a stockwhip made of kangaroo leather, and is very proud of it. He has brought it with him to the camp, although it can't be of much use to him for cutting burrs. Last night, after the long yarns about snakes, we went to bed. While I was undressing I noticed one brute half hidden under my bed.



I jumped back and sang out to the others. They never moved, just laughed. In a moment I had my hoe, and with a mighty blow nearly cut in halves—Syd's stockwhip.

My mates were still laughing with all their might when I brought them the spoil. Mat went on laughing. I joined him. Syd was swearing, and for part of the night cursed New Chums in general.

\* \* \*

Mat is naturally very vain; his vanity knows no limit; he believes that he can cook. To-night he has given us what they call "flap-jacks;" it really does not deserve such a high-sounding name. A flap-jack is made by first spilling some water on some flour (or the flour on the water, I don't remember which), then when it has been worked to the consistency of putty two months old, you flatten the thing with your hands, and drop it into boiling fat. Afterwards comes the dangerous part of the operation—you have to eat it.

I am wondering whether "flap-jacks" are yet another joke!

\* \* \*

Sunday! No burrs to cut for twenty-four hours, which makes to-day doubly a day of rest. I have to break the Sabbath all the same, and do some washing. This is a work entirely

novel to me. What a lot of things they don't teach you at school!

I found a dead tree, half in the creek, half out of it, and beautifully adapted, I thought, to serve as a scrubbing board; so I started on a pair of white moleskin trousers. It certainly takes a lot of soap to get anything like a result, and before I had finished one side of the garment the creek was soapy for yards round me. I must say that I had to give an extra scrubbing to one leg, as I had left half a plug of tobacco in the pocket.

When I felt satisfied that one side was done, I found the other all green with the slime and mud which caked my scrubbing board, so I had to finish the job in the creek. I reflected that we go through life seeing people doing washing, and we never realise what this means till we have to try ourselves. There is much more in washing clothes than you ever dreamt of.

\* \* \*

The mail arrives here only once a week—on Saturdays. I have received a letter to-day which I have expected with dread for some time.

Mary Smith does not write a very good hand, but she can write six pages on end. Of course, I knew that men do not understand

the love of a woman. Goodness knows, they have been trying long enough, but still they don't know what it is worth.

I also was aware that we are a selfish lot, that I was no exception. But I was not aware that the woman who knew me could not live away from me. I felt I must be a terrible nuisance to be in her mind day and night, to follow her everywhere like a ghost.

I agreed with her that I ought to be ashamed never to have written her a single word for three long months, after having left without even saying good-bye. But what I felt most keenly about in the letter was her mentioning coming out to Australia.

This promise decided me to answer her letter, a thing I did not mean to do at first. I told her in three pages that I would dread to see her in this lonely land, far away from civilisation, risking her life every day, in a country teeming with snakes and cannibals, under a fierce sun. I put in a few more venomous spiders and centipedes, some awful malarias and jungle fevers.

And when I read over the letter I was sorry I was not a born liar, otherwise I would not have wished to kick myself as I did.

\* \* \*

Miss Murphy is the only young woman on

this station. She is the governess, and looks after the boss's children. When I arrived here first I thought her—the plainest woman I ever had seen. In fact, I never knew a woman could be so plain and live. I suppose some faces are like tea on board ship—you get used to them because there is nothing else. Anyhow, now I can look at her during meals without breaking anything.

The poor lady has no idea, I am sure, that she is far from pretty. She looks at herself in the dining-room mirror opposite her seat at the table. She sports brooches and ribbons; smiles and makes eyes. Providence has done well to endow us with such a powerful imagination, otherwise we would commit suicide, dozen of us at a time. Miss Murphy is, I believe, silently admired by Thomson, the book-keeper. I even suspect Thomson of writing poetry for her in the store, while cockroaches run upon the wall and mice have a meeting in the "sultana" case.

\* \* \*

The station owns a pet ram, and is proud of the ownership. Why they should be I cannot understand. The brute is ugly, covered up to its wicked eyes with a dense greasy fleece, which seems three sizes too big. It is called Philip, eats all sorts of things, and takes notice

of everything. Yesterday, while I was going to the office, Philip took notice of me, and came straight in my direction with his head down. I was able to catch him by the horns and stop his impetus, but as soon as I let him go he insisted on aiming at my shin bones. After five minutes of a miniature bull fight, I had to take refuge upon a small stump just to see what Philip would do. Philip calmly waited, keeping his eyes on me. I wished something interesting would happen to draw the beast's attention somewhere else, but I was everything in the world to Philip just now. The stump was small, and was getting uncomfortable, when Miss Murphy called me to reach the children's ball, which had lodged on the roof of the verandah. Philip seemed to understand what was wanted of me. He followed as soon as I left the stump, and in spite of my smart "feinte," knocked me down from behind.

Miss Murphy burst into a tactless laugh. She is really awfully plain when she laughs!

\* \* \*

The cook is a greasy individual of a versatile turn of mind. Before handling pots and pans he was a sailor, then a miner. Boiled leg of mutton, hot and cold, roast ditto, cold or hot, seems to be the "plats de résistance" of his

variety show. He has a weakness for blanc mange and plum duff. The boss and his wife seem satisfied with the menus, and everybody eats without protest mutton twenty-one times a week and very few vegetables.

The cook is a terrible smoker, and smokes terrible tobacco, which he cuts indifferently with a bread knife or a dessert knife. He is fond of talking about any subject, but racing and politics are the themes he really enjoys.

I have been wondering whether his mining days had anything to do with his last night's plum pudding, for I found in it several mineral specimens. One of them cost me a tooth.

This "chef" is also a great reader, and devours pages after pages of literature. The food he likes for his brain is no blanc mange by any means; it consists of very strongly curried novels like "Ben's Plucky Pard of Silver Gulch," or "Juanita, the Mexican Deadly Queen." I find that the men in the hut also appreciate these books very much.

\* \* \*

Occasional visitors are a distraction in the bush, though sometimes people avail themselves too freely of Australian hospitality. Last night a man arrived on foot from Queensland—some 500 miles. His baggage consisted

of a small hand bag, which might hold a suit of summer pyjamas, a hair brush, and a tooth brush. He was dressed in a tourist Scotch tweed, and wore a brown bowler hat. The boss did not know at first what to make of him. He looked like what is vaguely called a gentleman, but a very dirty, unwashed gentleman. Mr. Telford offered him some tea, and when he found the visitor had decided to have his dinner at the homestead, he broadly hinted at a bath. He took him to the outside bathroom, and gave him a full course of instruction—how to pull the string for a shower, how to fill the bath, and how to empty it. The visitor was assured that with due care the handling of the taps was without any danger. He seemed to take a certain amount of interest in the demonstration, and inspected the whole thing as if it were a new kind of machinery.

For reasons of his own he did not take a bath, though he arrived at the table with his hair wet and carefully parted.

Mrs. Telford treated the man with her usual kindness in spite of his dirty collar and his generally neglected appearance. His conversation was interesting, and he told us of his trip from Queensland with a certain amount of humour. Considering the hard time he must have had on the track, with no camping outfit

and a brown bowler hat, he must be a plucky individual.

After dinner, while we were in the smoking-room, the visitor consented to solve for us the mysteries of his profession. He was a bump reader. He offered Mr. Telford there and then to read his bumps and his wife's for half-a-crown a piece, but the boss was not interested. The overseer had the bumps of his seven children read at family prices, and next morning the man in tweeds disappeared along the dusty track.

\* \* \*

Yesterday the boss gave me a holiday in order to enable me to see the Cowlong races. Cowlong is a heap of jam tins, round which fifty people are living, or think they are. It consists chiefly of a pub., a police station, a store, and a church, for they drink, eat, get run in, and die just as in any other place. Why this spot exists, and how it does, seems an impossible problem—to a New Chum, anyhow. Nevertheless, there is the C.J.C., which meets twice a year.

The meeting was interesting, I must say. The grand stand looked like a roosting place. The "buffet" was made of gum boughs. The weighing was done on the store scales. I don't suppose the horses had any idea about



their ancestors, but they ran and jumped well enough to arouse excitement amongst some 150 spectators, who gambled and lost money cheerfully. That night when I left the place a few drunks crowded the verandah of the "Harp of Erin," and things were getting jolly. The wooden lock-up, I was told, had barely standing room by 9 o'clock that night.

I saw Charley "in town" (Cowlong calls itself a town, so does any place which boasts of more than five houses). He never misses any "function," and seems to be a very popular man. He had a lot of friends, for he owns a generous heart, and all the money he earns is swallowed, literally, by these friends.

\* \* \*

Charley, the rabbitier, has a story. To look at him one would not expect much interest in his past. He is a good-natured individual. The main part of his profile has been utterly spoiled by years of spree. You certainly cannot realise that Charley will one day or another be Sir Charles —. He has never told a word of his history in cold blood, but has dropped some of its incidents at the "Harp of Erin" many a time. It appears that his father owns a beautiful estate in England. Charley, the heir to the title and to the property, was, when out of Oxford, destined to be the husband of a

carefully-chosen young lady. Charley had a mind of his own, and refused blankly to have his love affairs managed by anybody but himself. Sir James — showed the door to his son. Charley made use of it, and never even turned round to shut it. This was eight years ago.

Charley landed in Australia with no proverbial half-a-crown and a taste for drink, which rapidly developed. He worked off and on upon different stations, and has been here rabbiting for the last eighteen months.

One day I stopped at his camp, where a dozen dogs, of all colours and no breed, took loud notice of my arrival. Charley threw sticks and swore at them, then offered me a cup of tea, which I accepted. There was no sign of Oxford about him while he went on skinning his rabbits; but Sir Charles came out when he handed me the pannikin of tea and the sugar. His voice had suddenly changed to a gentler note while he acted the host, and his manners had become different at once. From what I could see, he lives very much like a blackfellow. His furniture is mostly bark and sticks. A frying pan and a billy are his cooking utensils. He seems fairly happy. All this shows how easily we go back to the Stone Age of life if we only get a chance.

Another visitor, this time an insurance agent, has fallen upon us yesterday. After a good meal at the homestead (which he illustrated with a lot of funny anecdotes), the agent started to buttonhole the household, from the boss down to the cook. Mr. Telford did not believe in gambling with his life, and would not follow the agent's demonstration that if he died in ten years from now the company (the best in Australia) would give him back his money and a good lot besides.

Nobody at the homestead valued his life very much, so the agent directed his fire towards the men's huts. They had been warned in time, and were ready for the enemy.

The man entered the hut where seven pipes were smoking their hardest. "Good evening, boys!" he said with his best smile. Some grunts responded, but nobody stirred. The agent was not discouraged; he started to tell them some choice yarns. The men did not laugh very loud, just as if they were afraid they might be charged for the funny stories. Nevertheless, they each took the cigar he was offering, and puffed away with their right elbow out, just to show him that they knew how to hold a cigar.

The system was fully explained, a system which just made it a joke to die in order to

get the best of the company, But the men were either slow of intellect or would not grasp the beauty of the system. No end of figures, no amount of literature distributed for their perusal, could convince them. Besides, the cigars were getting short stumps, and some of the boys were tired. Syd was the first to disappear from the circle of listeners. Jim followed suit three minutes later. The agent was busy explaining to Mat how much he would get back when seventy-five years old. When he turned round he found the audience lessened by three. The four left were getting nervous, and each was hoping he would not be left alone to face the speaker.

The agent felt he was not appreciated. Two more disappeared, and soon after the Old Guard retreated in bad order.

Finding himself alone in front of the fireplace, the agent was seized with a sudden fit of anger, and words filled the hut like the smoke of his rotten cigars. In the bunks could be seen forms squirming under blue blankets. The man's language was getting too strong, even for the hut. Syd got up and told him to insure his face against accidents. The agent got out of the room. Then the men had another quiet smoke and a laugh.

The boss must have found my specialty, for he trusts me now with a lot of boundary riding. At first, some months ago, riding was a real pleasure to me. I still like it, but I feel less excited about it.

Riding is no doubt a very enjoyable exercise, but it seems to me it depends a lot on the company you are in and on the country you have to go through. Being by myself, and riding for eight hours along miles of wires in a paddock which is called the One Tree Paddock, will explain perhaps why I have become a little "blasé" about the pig-skin. The One Tree Paddock deserves its name, but flatters itself all the same. The lonely tree is there, but it has been dead for years.

To see a fence running in a perfectly straight line towards the horizon gives you an idea of the infinite, of the never-ending, which is nearly maddening.

During these lonely hours in the paddock I have caught myself reciting or singing aloud all I could gather out of my memory. When the spring came, and the flies were getting numerous, I had to stop declamation and singing, for I was swallowing some at each verse.

I have been told that people who live in the bush go mad at times. I can believe it. I have dreamt dreams with my eyes open. I have

thought mad thoughts, and made plans foolish and impossible. And there is no sign of lunacy in my family.

The crow reminds you that you are awake; the rustling of its wings has the sweet "frou-frou" of a woman's dress, its croak is the laugh of the devil. The kangaroo bounds weirdly in front of you, and the emu passes in a frantic and ridiculous gait.

\* \* \*

To-day I found in the corner of the paddock a sheep lying down. One eye had been taken out by the crows, who, perched on the fence posts, resented my interference, and croaked angrily. The poor brute had been struggling during the torture, and two half-circles were scraped bare on the ground where it lay. The socket full of blood seemed to stare at the pale blue sky. The sight of it filled me with rage.

I did not even try to put the beast on its legs, but made up my mind to shorten its agony.

For the first time in my life I killed a sheep. My hand was trembling while the knife searched a good spot on the woolly throat, but the blade did its work well. I shut my eyes and set my teeth while I heard the life gurgling out of the gash. When I felt the body still

and insensible I looked, and saw the pool of blood, beautiful in its colour under the bright sun.

It took me nearly half an hour to skin the sheep; it was not expert skinning, but it was hard work. I brought the skin to the station.

The boss looked at it, and never said a word. The boy inspected the spoil, and remarked that it was fairly rough. I know that he showed it to some of the men. The exhibition made them wonder loudly.

As long as they live they won't know what it cost me to kill the poor brute, and their laughs will never counterbalance the awful pangs I felt when my knife first entered that skin.

\* \* \*

Bill had a pup for sale—a beautiful pup. The pedigree of this infant dog was something to be proud of. The performances of the pup's parents, the prizes they had taken at shows, added considerably to the value of "Algeron," which was for sale at three guineas. I thought the figure somewhat exaggerated, but Bill assured me that he had refused many offers already.

I know the sheep-dog instinct is in him already. At six weeks old he works chickens in spite of angry hens. He is full of pluck, and

barks at draught horses. Bill was finally willing to let me have him for £2, which he said was a real bargain.

"Algernon," in spite of his alleged aristocratic origin, is nothing much to look at. He is black and tan, and as woolly as a bear. His fur has already been put through a severe test. Being of an exploring turn of mind, he went the other day roaming round the cask of molasses, which is badly leaking since the summer started. He took great interest in this cask, and managed to get his fur into one solid mass of molasses. To make things worse, he rolled several times in the dust, and then looked more like a lump of dirt than anything else. He did not appear to be worth £2 then. I spent a Sunday morning in melting "Algy" in three buckets of water and a quantity of soap. I got rid of most of the molasses and of the best part of his fur.

Being too young to be taken out in the run, he spends his days at the end of a long chain, which he twists to a fourth of its length. He manages now and then to slip his collar, and to practise on fowls. He varies the distraction by inspecting the boss's garden, and chasing ghosts amongst the best flower beds. He certainly likes to show off, and keeps the public eye on him.



Yesterday I thought he was ripe for a debut, so tied him at the end of a long cord in order to make him follow the horse. His first steps were not spontaneous; he let himself be dragged like a log of wood. He soon found out that the ordinary method of progress was best, but would not go straight; he was tacking all the time. He must have learned before the possibilities of a horse's hind legs, for he kept at a respectful distance, leaving no slack in the cord.

The horse resented being tied to a pup, and gave a sudden jerk, which nearly unsettled me. "Algy" gave also a jerk, and cantered in the direction of the homestead, trailing ten feet of rope behind him. Pedigreed animals seem hard to train.

\* \* \*

By looking through the lists of passengers arriving from London by s.s. "Ortona," I saw with horror the name of Miss M. Smith.

I know that 31 per cent. of humanity is labelled Smith. Nevertheless I felt certain that the passenger in question is the very one I do not want to see in Australia—or anywhere else.

The boat called at Fremantle on the 16th; she would be in Sydney in a week. Danger was getting nearer. After some sleepless

nights I decided to send a wire to Miss M. Smith.

"Where shall I meet you? Wire George, P.O. Hay."

It was a bold move, but it took me a long time to write the line.

Two mails arrived. No answer. It was agony.

This morning the blow came down.

"Meet me Saturday, Coffee Palace, Sydney.—Smith."

I told the boss I wanted to go down to Sydney—on business, not on pleasure—which was perfectly true.

My feelings were strangely mixed and hard to describe when I crossed the door mat of the Coffee Palace.

I inquired for Miss Smith, and gave the porter my card. He disappeared up the lift, leaving me in the hall looking at the picture of "The Battle of Trafalgar." It seemed a long three minutes waiting. The porter came back, my card still in his hand. Miss Smith thought there must be some mistake. My name was unknown to her.

My heart leapt with joy—like the boy who has just escaped a private meeting with the head master. I could scarcely believe my luck.

I turned on my heels and made for the door,

but before I had gone two steps the porter called me back. I found myself face to face with a very pretty girl.

She timidly introduced herself as Miss Madeline Smith, just out from London. She answered my wire, believing it would reach her cousin George Sharp. I began to feel sorry I was not that cousin, for the Miss Smith I had before me was a very sweet creature.

We both laughed at the mistake. Personally, I thought it a very good joke.

\* \* \*

Shearing has started. I was curious to see what it was like, for they have been talking about it for the last two months. This morning at 8.30, after the roll call, the engine's whistle blew. The men were ready and set to work. The gates of the pens banged, and the shed was filled with a buzzing noise. The machines cut their tracks through the dense wool, and the fleeces were peeled off like the skin from huge potatoes. The sheep appeared white as snow. There was a red streak here and there, but a dab from the tar-boy soon changed it into a dirty splash.

My particular job was weighing the bales and branding them, so I had time at first to watch the whole process with both eyes. The first bale I branded was not an unqualified suc-

cess—too much ink on my brush, the stencil plate somewhat crooked. The boss and the two pressers were looking at me while I was branding, a thing I object to when I do some delicate work. The boss said nothing; his silence was painful to hear.

The following bales were branded straight and neat, without a smudge. I felt like a kid doing the first page of a new copy book, and, like a kid, had my fingers full of ink. This job is going to last five weeks, so I shall have time to learn branding bales thoroughly.

\* \* \*

Shearing, like most things in this world, is interesting at first, then it gets monotonous. Wet weather gave us a spell now and then; finally, the last sheep was shorn, and the last bale branded.

The greasy, grumbly shearer had a thorough wash, left his working clothes to adorn the surroundings of his hut, and appeared dressed for town. These shearers are suddenly different men. They have a smile and a joke ready for everybody while they wait for their turn to pocket their cheque.

The traces the shearers and rouseabouts leave behind them afford matter for a study of their gastronomic tastes. A big heap of jam tins, pickles, vinegar, and tomato sauce

bottles, all of a good brand, are a proof that they are epicures. The general appearance of the inside of the hut leads one to suppose that tidiness is not a virtue amongst them. Packs of cards, worn-out boots and clothes, straw, empty cigarette packets, old newspapers, and letters, &c., are all left for us to burn in a big stack. Numerous slush lamps, the product of local industry, are also conspicuous. A slush lamp is a contrivance which smokes and smells a lot, but gives little light. It was invented during the Stone Age, and has never been improved since.

\* \* \*

We had some distractions during shearing. One afternoon arrived a rattling trap drawn by the shadow of a horse, in charge of an old man and a boy. The whole turnout was labelled "The World's Entertainment Company." The rumour soon spread that a performance would be given that night.

There was a good house, and an appreciative one; the programme was full of variety.

It opened with a song, accompanied by a concertina. Then the boy gave an exhibition of step dancing, after which the old man recited "The Charge of the Light Brigade." I had heard the masterpiece before, but this man presented it in quite a new way. His pipe

never left his mouth during the Charge, and in the thickest of the fight he coolly stopped to relight it.

The next number was the magic lantern. We saw successively the "Death of Mary Queen of Scots," "The Discovery of Australia," "The Kelly Gang," a portrait of "Deeming" the famous murderer, "Tarcoola," and the "Royal Family." "Tarcoola" and the "Kelly Gang" divided the honours between them.

A gramophone ground a few comic songs and played the National Anthem out of a worn-out, cracked record. Few of the men had cash, so they put their names down, and the sum of 28s. was collected.

\* \* \*

Thomson, the bookkeeper, is more than ever in love with Miss Murphy. The warming up of his love can be seen growing apace. His ties are tied more carefully, and are of tender hue. His hair is parted mathematically and smoothed down, till it looks as if he had his head japanned. Thomson is not better looking than the ordinary man you meet, but I suppose all people in love fancy themselves a bit.

Yesterday being Saturday, Thomson was very busy giving out rations, cleaning the store,

and counting scalps brought in by Charley and the other rabbiters.

This operation is both tedious and odorous; the scalps are sometimes a fortnight old, and the dead kittens are very dead.

Thomson was on the store verandah counting the 768th scalp, when Miss Murphy happened to pass quite close, back from a walk with the children. The bookkeeper lifted his eyes and was ready for a cheerful greeting, but Miss Murphy only lifted her little nose and passed without a sign of recognition. The incident was, like the smell of the scalps, far-reaching, and brought down a big cloud on Thomson's life for over a week, but this was a long time for Miss Murphy to stay without feeling or hearing somebody's admiration; so they made it up somehow. Thomson came to life again, and once more whistled merrily to the cockroaches in the store.

\* \* \*

Christmas! I am told by the almanac that this is Christmas Day. The thermometer marks 101 deg. under the verandah, and the flies are swarming everywhere. You would expect that in Australia old Father Christmas would be allowed to go without his furs, with scarcely anything on. But imagination is hard

to kill; the poor man in everybody's mind as well as on the Christmas cards is obliged to be in full uniform.

We have a Christmas tree, and have to face a plum pudding just as solid as the genuine English article. The fat goose is there, too!

O, for just one square yard of real snow! One breath of cold, snappy wind, loaded with the scent of pines! If I live a hundred years in Australia the 25th of December will be the day before the 26th, but never Christmas.

All the same it was fairly gay to-day till after the long dinner, when most of us felt sleepy.

I noticed that Thomson had a sprig of paper mistletoe (paper mistletoe, think of it!) hanging from one of the beams of his store; I noticed, also, that Miss Murphy had to go to the store to get some ink. It took her some twenty minutes to get it!

\* \* \*

I never knew what thirst meant till I came to this country. What I had taken for thirst before was only make-believe compared to the desire you have here to drown yourself in cold water. The weather has been keeping hot lately—107 deg. in the shade and about 95 deg. in the moonlight! The result is that we do



not sleep much at night, but pass our time hanging on to a water bag.

We are four in the bachelors' quarters, and often meet on our verandah at all hours of the night, saying a word to the water bag. We each have our own hanging in front of our door. Thomson, who is a teetotaller, has the biggest. It must have been made to order.

When I go round the fence of the One Tree paddock, which takes about eight hours, without seeing a drop of water, I am nursing a beautiful thirst. The long hours pass, the saddle groans and creaks, the horse walks like a machine under the terrible sun. Then after the gate is passed the beast starts cantering on its own accord, for we are getting near the river. The dog (which now follows without a hawser) has suddenly disappeared. I find him swimming and pretending to swallow the whole river. The horse steps carefully down the bank, stretches his neck and gently takes a long drink. The third beast goes on its knees, throws its hat off, and plunges its face in the water.

\* \* \*

The gay warbling of the magpie, the sad, hellish note of the crow during the day, the cheerful whistle of the wagtails, the lonely cry of the curlew at night, are the things which

impressed me most at first in the Australian bush. What I have seen and heard about this country leads me to believe that it is a land of contrasts. Fine seasons are followed by awful droughts. When rain has been plentiful and herbage is knee-high, the fire sweeps the plain as soon as summer comes. The bushman is always fighting something—seasons, pests or diseases—and this continual fight has made of him a plucky philosopher, a man who takes things as they come, since they insist in coming so often when they are not wanted. The Australian is also a gambler at heart; he has to be, for everything seems to be a gamble in the bush. When he sees his sheep dying all over the paddocks, when he is sick of skinning swollen carcasses, he thinks he will get better luck next year. When crop after crop is a failure, he tears the ground once more with his plow, and says to himself, "Better luck next time!"

During a prosperous season, if you ask him how things are with him, he will, as a rule, answer, "Not too bad!" Being a gambler, he is superstitious, and seems frightened lest the Fates hear him say, "Very good!" And when things are bad he will answer, "Not too good!" just as if he were expecting worse, and were ready for it, too.

The bush is sad; the bushman is sad, too. His face is lit up by beautiful big eyes, deep, like sailors' eyes, and, like them, always looking far ahead, and then they will see things the New Chum cannot see. All Australian aborigines and animals have beautiful eyes. There must be something in the atmosphere which dilates the pupils.

What I miss most in this country is a forest of big shady trees, the dark green foliage, the running water, and the moss. I miss the hedges and the old stone walls covered with ivy. I miss the snow and the ice, which cracks like powdered sugar under the skates. But, then, wherever we live, we miss something, and the Australian would freeze in our snow just as we gasp under his sun.

\* \* \*

Sunday night. Why is this night always sad with me? Ever since my school days I have disliked Sunday nights. Then I probably regretted the short holiday, and had in perspective the French class first thing on Monday morning. But the feeling will stay with me all my life. It takes me hours to go to sleep. I am thinking of home, and I can plainly hear, about eight o'clock at night, the church bells thousands of miles away. And now, a curlew

is crying not a hundred yards from my room. It makes the night sadder still.

\* \* \*

Charley has received an important letter from a Sydney solicitor. His father is dead. So Charley the rabbitter is now Sir Charles —.

He left the station yesterday. The news of his father's death seems to have told on him. His face was stern, and his eyes seemed to stare into the gone past, into years of life and love wasted by him. He shook hands with all of us, gave his dogs to Bill, and asked him to look after them. After he had gone some yards he turned round, for he heard "Ginger-beer," his pet slut, barking furiously and pulling on the chain. He called out to Bill to let her loose. Mad with joy, the little beast ran after him, and, while he was patting her, he lifted his hat once more to bid us farewell, and they were gone.

We heard from the mailman that Charley had gone straight through the township without even looking at the "Harp of Erin." He camped near the river till the coach passed.

\* \* \*

Old Jones is the oldest hand on the place; he has a fine head, with long white hair and beard, which they say were one time closely

shaven. Some assume that his heavy way of walking comes from the irons he used to wear round his ankles, for he was sent out here for having stolen six geese. Whether it is true or not, Jones is a fine fellow, and everybody treats him with respect. He does odd jobs, looks after the dogs, and drives old "Trooper" at the horseworks when the tanks want filling.

Jones loves his pipe; I never have seen him without it. I have even found him asleep with the black briar in his mouth.

Trooper is a horse which knows enough to be something else. He can open any gate, and has tried with success every patent gate-opener on the place. He has a knack of going where horses ought not to go. He was found once partly in the harness room. He got jammed in the door, and for some time could not make up his mind whether to get in or out. Finally, he decided to retreat, taking away with him one side of the building.

\*     \*     \*

Jack, the carpenter, is the ideal type of a man, who can make furniture out of packing cases; candlesticks, soap dishes, flower vases, lanterns and other things out of kerosene tins. I should like to know what the man cannot do. He repairs boots and kitchen utensils, mends chairs, watches and waggons, does

some blacksmithing, cleans guns and chimneys. Nothing frightens him. He would fix up a typewriter if you asked him, or try to mend a broken thermometer. I wanted to see how far his pluck would go, so went to his shop this morning to have a yarn with him. He was busy making a new head for Lizzie's doll. The new head was a bit out of proportion with the body, but it had eyes, nose, mouth and ears, all complete, and a short crop of hair cunningly done with a piece of rabbit skin stuck on with glue.

I quite solemnly asked Jack if he thought he could make a piano. He never flinched, and was ready for me. "Maybe I could, but it'll take some working; only them notes would be the trouble—such a lot of them, and the wires, too." He thought that nice redgum, well polished and varnished, would look well. He said he might tackle it one day or another. I daresay he will.

\* \* \*

"Araminta," Lizzie's doll, had to be re-christened, for, according to the owner, she was not a bit like the old doll before the accident, so she became Ivy. But Ivy's life was short. She was left in the sun, and her yellow box head not being well seasoned, split right across. One of the pups saw the last of Ivy.

I have not been long enough out here to know much about sheep, but I have studied them on many occasions. My first question to myself was, "Are sheep as brainless as they are said to be generally?" Philip, the pet ram which I personally know, seems to have a fair amount of reasoning power (he knew I would have to get off that stump) and a good share of will (he would not be satisfied till he got me). Pet lambs are no fools, and know a lot of things, especially a bottle with a quill stuck into the cork.

I have often watched a mob going through a gate. No two faces are alike. Many of them remind one of people one knows. I have seen the old ewe with a curly fringe on her forehead and a cunning look in her eyes. I had met that ewe before—on two legs. I spotted a big, fat wether with a silly eye, his face adorned with side whiskers and full of self-conceit. I knew a butler exactly like it. Some look happy with their lot, some seem sorry they are just sheep. But I like most the ewe, proud of the white lamb who worries the life out of her and who nearly knocks her down at meal times. I admire her when she suddenly turns round to face the dog and stamps her foot.

The first sundowner I met interested me. He told me he walked from Queensland looking for work and not finding any. He was a young man, strong and full of life. His story reached my heart. I gave him some tobacco and a shilling. He called me a gentleman. The next morning he had left the place. So had a roast leg of mutton, a water-bag, and some washing.

Since that time I do not encourage swaggies to call me a gentleman any more, though they most of them come from the Queensland border. My heart has become callous, and unless the tramp is an old or feeble man I consider sundowners lazy philosophers, rambling Diogenes who are showing people that Australia is a country where anyone can live by merely moving his legs. They do not use their biceps. A good pair of calves is all they want. Most men work to get a living. The swaggie walks to get the same result.

One of them camped on the river for weeks, catching fish, which he exchanged at the store for some tobacco, tea, or jam. Last Sunday I passed his camp, when he called me for a pipeful of tobacco. His own story came out with the first whiffs, and before I had time to light my pipe he had started to unfold his biography. He said he had been a clerk in a Sydney office



at 30s. per week. He fell in love with a girl; she fell in love with him. One day she changed her mind. He nearly lost his, and when she married the other man he took to drink. Drink took him by the hand and led him on the tracks, where he has impressed the nails of his boots for the last ten years.

He has become a woman hater, never goes within coo-ee of a female if he can help it; never drinks at a pub. where there is a woman behind the bar.

The man is not old, but his hair has gone grey, and his face has deep lines. He spoke quietly, without passion, and seemed reconciled with his lot. A few hooks for his fishing and some tobacco seem to be all he wants, till he gets enough money to spend at the nearest hotel.

\* \* \*

The boss sent me to O'Mealy, the selector, to give him notice about lamb marking. I was careful in opening O'Mealy's gate, for it looked a delicate and fragile structure. In spite of all my precaution, it fell in three pieces. The patching-up was done under difficulties, for two dogs were barking furiously while approaching towards me. A dirty child flew into the house, leaving his toys behind—a sheep's head and a jam tin.

Mrs. O'Mealy received me from the verandah, buttoning a pink blouse. Her skirt was not long enough to hide the bare fact that she had no stockings, though she had boots. I guessed it was not her day at home. Nevertheless she showed me into the "drawing-room," asking me to wait till she called her husband. I had a minute to inspect the drawing-room; it was ample. The piano took my breath; it had the place of honour, and was loaded with photos in plush and hand-painted frames. The floor disappeared under opossum and rabbit skins; the chairs were draped with "art" muslin and ribbons.

O'Mealy came in, said good-day, and made some remarks about the state of the atmosphere. He received the message I delivered with marked interest. He invited me to play a "toone" on his piano. I had to own my complete ignorance. He seems very proud of the instrument, which he considers as a drawing-room piece of furniture more than anything else; for nobody in the house can play it.

He would have introduced me to the child, the pigs and the cows, had I not hinted that I had a good way to ride. He has fifty acres under cultivation. The same fifty acres have stood the process for the last eleven years. Sometimes they give a harvest, but not often.

O'Mealy has only a small flock (a few wethers and a fair number of lambs). His selection is a poor bit of country. Still, the man lives; he even owns a piano. Mystery!

\* \* \*

The boss told me to-night that it was no mystery at all. It was only sheep-stealing. And him so pleasant and so polite to talk to! I hope that he will utilise the proceeds of his next transaction in buying half a dozen pairs of "warranted fast dye" for Mrs. O'Mealy.

\* \* \*

I had to ride forty miles to see the dentist, for I have damaged another tooth while eating peas two days ago. I must have struck a petrified one. The dentist, the only one in this town, was out shooting, so I had to wait till next morning, which gave me an opportunity to see a bush town of some 2500 people.

I did not know a soul, but soon found some men anxious to become my friends. One of them was a life insurance agent. He went as far as offering me a drink, which was an unwise thing for him to do, as beer and whisky are deadly in this place. So I refused the offer and offended my new friend.

Another man came, and with a great amount of discretion tried to find out if I were as much of a New Chum as I looked. He asked me

whether I did not want a nice little property, and before I could say No, took out of his pocket a bundle of particulars. All were the best properties on the market; some were "tip-top," some were real "snaps." The conversation ended by the offer of another drink and another polite but firm refusal.

The town does not look very lively; I counted fifteen hotels, and wondered how they could exist, though the place has the reputation of suffering from thirst.

I saw one of the local identities, "Kookaburra Jack," a pure blackfellow, who came to shake hands with me. His dress was partly military and partly mufti. The general dinginess of the outfit made a good blend of the whole. He asked me for some tobacco and for 3d. He has been through forty years of civilisation; all he has learned from the white man is to drink whisky and eat skilly.

The buildings, except the Police Station, look rather flimsy and without any style. Verandahs are a great feature of the place. They must be a necessity, for every other verandah post supports a man. I saw a fair amount of men in the main street who seem to have no pressing work to do. They smoke and spit for hours at a time without getting tired of either.

This place has a Jockey Club, a Trotting Club, a Cricket and Football Club, and a Pigeon Shooting Club. There must be a lot of money about here, though it does not give you this impression at first.

I heard that this town is renowned in New South Wales for its inflammability. Last year there were twenty-three fires. The local fire brigade arrived too late on twenty-four occasions, the twenty-fourth being a false alarm. The people must have become fireproof, for they always escape unhurt. The only architect of the town is also agent of a fire insurance company; he is doing well, they say.

\* \* \*

Bill has received a letter from England, on crested paper, and he showed it to us. The writing was lacking firmness, but showed here and there that Sir Charles was trying hard to forget he had been Charley. The style was not befitting the beautiful "cream laid." He asked how everybody was, what the season was like, and inquired about the dogs. His sudden change of situation has left him cool-headed; he has not forgotten his friends, and has sent a good cheque to them as a token of remembrance. There was a P.S. at the foot of the last page:—

"I have to pay a cove 25s. a week and found

to prevent anybody from killing the rabbits on my estate! I am sick of rabbits, and am thinking about importing a poison cart."

\* \* \*

We are five men, not counting the cook, pushing 2500 wethers in front of us. It is slow progress, but we will get to our destination in five weeks. We find nice corners at night for the sheep: some yards of calico and three dogs chained at stakes makes the watch an easy matter. All the same, I feel my responsibility heavily and keep my watch conscientiously. So far we had fine weather, plenty of feed and water. I like the life very much, no doubt because it is novel to me. I wonder how I would enjoy it in the middle of summer or during wet weather?

Henry, in charge, is an old man who speaks little and seldom smiles, except to his dog. "Rusty" is indeed a marvellous animal, who understands the sign of his master's hand, and is always eager for work. When the sheep go too much one way or another, Rusty looks at Henry and Henry knows something is wrong. He makes a sign, the dog disappears, and without a bark brings the sheep back into their line.

Bob the blackfellow is a highly civilised aboriginal. He wears a rolled gold watch

chain, a nickel watch, and sports an embroidered silk handkerchief, which he values too much to use. Jim and Bill are two young fellows full of life and mischief. I believe I am the first New Chum they have seen at close quarters. They don't think much of the species. They have analysed me from head to foot, and nothing has escaped their quick eye. My sheath knife amuses them, but they often require it. The way I ride, the length of my stirrup leathers amuse them vastly. My ignorance on the subject of horses and horse-racing makes them really think I am a little simple.

The cook does not know how to cook the mutton which was sheep twenty minutes before. His puddings are good, solid work, and his tea is strong. Taken all round, we are a fairly happy lot, and when the pipes are lit and our toes are near the big camp fire the night birds may hear some fine fairy tales if they care to. A lot of the yarns are made up for my sole benefit. I pretend to take it all in, for I always enjoy looking a bigger fool than I am in reality.

\*     \*     \*

This morning being Sunday, and the rightful owner of a certain patch of very good feed not being about, we only were on the road for a

few hours and camped. There was a rush for a kerosene bucket, the property of the cook. Jim was first, and proceeded to boil his clothes, after which Bill took his turn. Then came mine, so I boiled my clothes with the air of a man who has managed a steam laundry. I was not going to ask questions, but would have liked to know how long the boiling was to last. I was afraid to get my clothes either underdone or parboiled, but I believe I did it about right. The cook came for his bucket, so I had to hurry the operation.

Half an hour after I recognised the bucket, with its crooked handle, on the cook's fire. There was a leg of mutton boiling inside. Of course I know it was only pure imagination, but I did not enjoy the dinner that day.

\* \* \*

This summer has been terrible. We are in March, and no sign of rain yet. The ground is bare, for the yellow dead grass is nearly gone. The sheep are dying all over the paddocks, and the crows are everywhere, full of life and hellish joy. A few hours after their death the poor sheep who are mere skeletons look enormous and fat. It seems like a grim joke. Many of them die too slowly, so the crows help them along and add to their long



agony. Nature is the cruellest thing on earth. Animals, most of them, cannot live or thrive without killing each other, so that very life means destruction. Man destroys more still, not only to keep himself alive, but to get rich or to amuse himself.

\* \* \*

Yesterday I saw a bullock bogged in the creek up to his belly. One of his eyes was gone. He was feebly defending the other against the crows. I could do nothing, so I turned my back and fled, and I swore a swear which never crossed my lips nor my mind before. All this useless suffering, this fiendish cruelty to poor brutes who can't defend themselves make a man ask, Why?

\* \* \*

Rain has come at last. I never knew before what rain meant. I never dreamt what beautiful sound drops can make on an iron roof, what delicious smell dust has when the first shower pits the powdered red earth. All has been transformed in a moment. The men, like children, let the heavy downpour wet them to the skin. Animals seem to breathe it like draughts of new life. The very cockatoos hang head down from the tops of the trees,

their wings spread open so as to get every drop on their feathers, while they shriek with a delight that is quite human. The colour of the trees has changed, the leaves have lost their dusty green, and are now vivid and glistening. Their trunk and their limbs are shiny. The earth, which looked a leper half an hour ago, has now a new complexion. It is once more the mighty Mother ready to give life.

We had all for weeks looked vainly at the sky. We had put our hopes in the small clouds which came towards us and then disappeared. We saw signs of a change in the way fowls did their feathers, in the halo round the moon, in the hurry of the ants round their nests. We ceased to believe in any sign till we got drenched.

After a wet winter and a flood, shearing came round again, but did not last long. There were not many sheep to shear, and a lamb was a curiosity. The place was understocked, the grass plentiful, so we had an awful bush fire. No stock was lost, but miles of fencing were burnt.

I have been a little over two years in Australia; I have seen a drought, a flood, and a fire. An earthquake is the next thing I expect.

\* \* \*

I was thinking about the smiling future

when Mary Smith reminded me in a long letter that she was still alive and still waiting for me. I hate to keep people waiting; on the other hand the Mary Smith ghost is casting a dark shadow on my life. I had nearly forgotten her during the last few months, and now she is with me once more.

The six pages (on scented paper) tell me what six pages had told me before. Her promise to come to Australia in the near future was still holding. Her love for me was not dying.

I had taken the firm resolution not to answer the letter, but after thinking and thinking, the fear took me once more of seeing Mary Smith landed in Australia. Finally I decided to write the following in a fairly well-disguised writing:—

“Karaboo Downs, N.S.W.

“Madame,—It was necessary to open your letter addressed to Mr. George Bell in order to return it. Mr. George Bell died of a sunstroke two months ago.—Yours faithfully,

“W. P. CARR.”

It took me a long time to choose a death; I thought of snakebite, thirst, and blackfellows' spears. The sunstroke is not quite so pic-

turesque, but it still has a fair amount of "couleur locale."

\* \* \*

Alf, the boy or groom, is a busy body. He has to milk the cows, kill the station sheep, cut wood, go for the mail, keep the place tidy, and do some "odd jobs." He is always required; he is everywhere. I believe he is the only man on the place who does not enjoy wet weather, for he has to run after his cows in the slushy yards. He sometimes finds the variety of his duties an excuse for having a little rest. When he is wanted to clean the laundry copper he has an appointment with a stray calf in the horse paddock. He likes visitors, and does cheerfully the extra work, as he gets a tip now and then.

Alf is a bit queer, but is a hard worker. He does get into rows at times with the cook, for bringing him red gum for his fire or for leaving the boots upon the kitchen table. He talks to himself by the hour, talks to the sheep he is going to kill, and gives him some little encouragement. He talks to the one-eyed cow who tries to kick him.

Alf has one great weakness; he is very fond of eggs. Mrs. Telford found that out at last, though she had strong

suspicious before. Alf since last month has to clean the fowl house, and ever since some of the fowls have stopped laying. The eggs were getting scarcer. Mrs. Telford went on watching. Yesterday she saw Alf coming from the direction of the fowl-house; she called him. Her quick eye could not but notice that Alf's shirt front was bulging in a singular way. Her plan was made in a second. She told him to crawl under the verandah floor, for she thought the cat must have died under the smoking-room. Alf hesitated, and was going to mention an appointment with the killing sheep, but Mrs. Telford did not give him time.

Alf disappeared under the floor where there was barely room for him to crawl. Mrs. Telford could not help laughing. She asked him if he saw anything, and as nothing could be seen, she told him to come out. Alf extracted himself with difficulty, and rubbed his eyes full of dust and cobwebs. The fact that he was carrying a raw omelet on his bosom was evident.

The fowls have started laying once more.

\* \* \*

Blessed be the mailman, who has ridden sixty miles and opened seventeen gates on the road to bring me these two letters—one from

my father; the fine old gentleman has put a nice sum at my disposition for the purchase of a station, should I feel able to start on my own. Fancy being one's own boss—sending Bill round the One Tree paddock, Jim along the creek, and, if it is a very hot day, having some writing to do in the office!

I know I have still a lot to learn, so I will get some more colonial experience before I brand my own sheep and my own bales.

The second letter is from Joe, the best of friends:—

“Your fiancée has borne the news of your death like—a woman! Within two months after the sad tidings she has managed to get engaged, and what is more, married to B. S. Snip, Esq. You may safely come to life once more.

“B. S. Snip is very rich; his father owns a prosperous tomato sauce factory, one of the best brands on the market (ask your grocer for it, and beware of imitations).”

My dignity will not allow me to congratulate Mrs. B. S. Snip on her latest acquisition.

The blessed mailman has gone back carrying in his bag a letter to my father and one to Joe.

## ADVICE TO NEW CHUMS.

I consider I know enough by this time to give New Chums a few tips which may be useful:—

1. Try to keep an angelic temper and a live imagination, for you will have to see jokes.

2. Don't be too sensitive, and don't take literally all you are told. You will be called at times all sorts of names except your own. You will be presented with adjectives you never met before. It is only their way of expressing themselves.

3. Remember how to hold your gun. Don't forget that a stockwhip and an axe are always loaded.

4. When you give them a hand in the sheep yards don't split the mob unless you can't help it. Don't light your pipe in front of the gate when they are trying to get 1500 wild wethers through it.

5. Don't pat horses on the nose when they are tied up to a post. It means as a rule a broken bridle and a lot more besides.

6. Learn the pedigree of Carbine by heart. It will help you a lot.

7. When you hear a snake yarn, multiply the breadth by the length and divide by ten. Same calculation applies to Murray cods.

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